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# Reading, Writing, and the Whip

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# Reading, Writing, and the Whip

Amber Jamilla Musser

When Jean Jacques Rousseau was eight years old, he was sent to Bossey, a village near Geneva, to board with Minister Lambercier for educational purposes. Miss Lambercier, Rousseau's nursemaid, was given the task of disciplining his brother and him. If unruly, the boys were spanked, a punishment that Rousseau found "much less terrible than the idea, and what is still more unaccountable, this punishment increased [his] affection for the person who had inflicted it."<sup>1</sup> He grew to crave being beaten, "for a degree of sensuality had mingled with the smart and shame, which left more desire than fear of a repetition."<sup>2</sup> He did fear Miss Lambercier's wrath enough to avoid further actual beatings; however, he began to fantasize about a woman who would treat him in the same despotic manner.<sup>3</sup> Rousseau wrote, "To fall at the feet of an imperious mistress, obey her mandates, or implore pardon, were for me the most exquisite enjoyments, and the more my blood was inflamed by the efforts of a lively imagination the more I acquired the appearance of a whining lover."<sup>4</sup> These ideas filled Rousseau with humiliation and excitation; they formed the substance of his first confession and lay the groundwork for the rest of the *Confessions*, which would become celebrated in the nineteenth century as one of the first modern autobiographies.<sup>5</sup> Reading Rousseau in late nineteenth-century Austria, Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, an eminent psychiatrist in Graz, labeled him a masochist.

Masochism was introduced to the scientific community in 1890 as part of the sixth edition of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis, Neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiet der Psychopathia Sexualis*. Though flagellation, a condition in which being whipped produced sexual excitation, was already widely known, masochism was a new perversion. Masochism, according to Krafft-Ebing, was not about pain, but rather about submission; he considered it a perversion of agency. At the suggestion of a patient, Krafft-Ebing derived the label, "masochism," from Leopold

von Sacher-Masoch, a novelist and history professor at the University of Graz. The patient described his enjoyment reading Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, which tells the story of Severin, a young aristocrat in love with Wanda, a beautiful, wealthy, aristocratic Slavic widow. In the novella, Wanda treats Severin as a slave as they travel around Italy.<sup>6</sup> Tableaus of domination form the bulk of the novella and provided grist for the patient's fantasies. Krafft-Ebing drew on Rousseau's autobiographical insight and Sacher-Masoch's novella to form masochism, a new diagnostic category whose "essential element" was "the feeling of subjection to the woman."<sup>7</sup>

While noting Rousseau's interest in flagellation, Krafft-Ebing described Rousseau's yearning for "the furrowed brow, the upraised hand, the severe look, the imperious attitude" as symptoms of masochism.<sup>8</sup> Under Krafft-Ebing's gaze, Rousseau's desire for punishment became a paradigmatic example of masochism.<sup>9</sup> According to Krafft-Ebing, the main marker of Rousseau's masochism was "the feeling of subjection to the woman"; Rousseau "love[d] the proud, scornful woman crushing him under her feet by the weight of her royal wrath."<sup>10</sup>

Understanding how and why Krafft-Ebing interpreted Rousseau's behavior as masochistic illustrates masochism's intimate connection with literature and its attendant practices of reading and writing.<sup>11</sup> Reading masochism as a literary phenomenon means exploring several layers of relationships—of literature and performance, of textuality and subjectivity—and the relationships among various practices of reading. I start with Krafft-Ebing and his practices of reading, examine the relationship between literature and practice, and end with an exploration of diagnosis and writing. Rousseau's *Confessions* exemplifies these rich layers, as a text with a life and readership of its own and as writing exercise, and exemplifies what Michel Foucault termed a "technology of the self."<sup>12</sup> The link I am forging between Krafft-Ebing and Foucault's technologies of the self offers a reevaluation of Krafft-Ebing and pre-psychoanalytic studies of sexuality.

History has not been kind to *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Historians of psychiatry describe this compendium of sexual perversity as a footnote in Krafft-Ebing's otherwise illustrious career as a leading Austrian psychiatrist. He is more fondly remembered as the author of a leading textbook in forensic psychiatry (*Grundzüge der Criminalpsychologie auf Grundlage der deutschen und österreichischen Strafgesetzgebung: für Juristen*), former president of the Vienna Neurological Society, and disciple of Morel and Bernheim.<sup>13</sup> Historians of sexuality, on the other hand, are quick to locate *Psychopathia Sexualis*, published in 1886, as the origin

of modern scientific studies on sexuality. As the archetype of *scientia sexualis*, the text has been denounced as emblematic of the modern desire to classify, condemn, and repress “deviant” sexualities.<sup>14</sup> This essay challenges those narratives. I argue that Krafft-Ebing’s masochists used literary narratives to transform themselves into masochists and, further, that the late nineteenth-century version of masochism was a practice that relied on literature, aesthetics, self-fashioning, and confession. By invoking Foucault’s technologies of the self, “which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality,” I argue that Krafft-Ebing’s masochists relied upon reading and writing as crucial components of identity formation.<sup>15</sup>

### Reading Rousseau, Inventing a Diagnosis

Krafft-Ebing was the head of an asylum near Graz in Austria when he published the first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. By this time, he was a well-established doctor, but it had been a long path to professional success.<sup>16</sup> In many ways *Psychopathia Sexualis* was a pioneering text. Though Krafft-Ebing was not alone in his scientific interest in sexual perversions, his decision to instigate an extended scholarly project on perversion and his belief that sexuality was the bedrock of society were unique to a man of his academic standing.<sup>17</sup> Krafft-Ebing was interested in approaching sexuality with an eye toward understanding its irrationality and attempting to make sense of (and hopefully reduce) the social turmoil that had enveloped *fin-de-siècle* Austria. He was rewarded for this endeavor; by the end of the nineteenth century, *Psychopathia Sexualis* came to be known as the most comprehensive text on sexual perversion.

*Psychopathia Sexualis* made sense of sexual abnormality in medical, anthropological, and legal terms. The first edition was published in 1886, while Krafft-Ebing was still a professor at the University of Graz. It was a slender text—110 pages—and contained only fifty-one case studies, many of which were borrowed from the international psychiatric community.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, the twelfth edition of the book, published in 1903 (and the last published under Krafft-Ebing’s guidance), was 437 pages and contained over 300 case studies, many of which were original to the text.<sup>19</sup> Krafft-Ebing’s case studies were drawn

from two general sources: they were either case studies of patients from his private practice, or they were unsolicited autobiographies from readers who wanted to share their sexual histories in order to receive either recognition or help. The result of Krafft-Ebing's assiduous compiling was a theoretical framework for perversion. His schema was flexible enough to incorporate novelty but had enough rigidity to create robust categories.

As the case studies amassed, Krafft-Ebing's framework gained nuance. The first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* discussed four types of sexual abnormality: *anaesthesia sexualis*, the absence of the sexual instinct; *hyperaesthesia*, the pathological increase of sexual instinct; *paradoxia*, the abnormal temporal emergence of sexual instinct among children or the elderly; and *paraesthesia*, perversion of the sexual instinct. *Psychopathia Sexualis*'s later editions further divided the "perversions of the sexual instinct" into two subcategories—one that was marked by a sexual inclination toward persons of the opposite sex and its opposite, which was marked by the absence of sexual feeling for the opposite sex and substitution with feelings for those of the same sex. Sadism, masochism, and fetishism fit under the former category, while homosexuality and its variety of permutations occupied the latter. Perversions that Krafft-Ebing considered rarer and more extreme, such as zoerasty, necrophilia, and incest, were given special consideration in *Psychopathia Sexualis*'s discussion of sexual pathology and the criminal court. This more nuanced organizational revision came after 1890's *Neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiet der Psychopathia Sexualis*.

Masochism was at the center of Krafft-Ebing's revised theory of sexuality. He considered it important both because of the large number of people he believed were afflicted with it and because of its apparent irrationality. Krafft-Ebing found masochism, which he defined as sexual excitation in submitting to a woman, perplexing because he could not understand why men would want to be powerless. Throughout the six editions of *Psychopathia Sexualis* that dealt with masochism, the theory that masochism was the product of an overly active feminine sexual drive remained consistent; only the case studies changed.<sup>20</sup> The diversity of cases is astounding: Krafft-Ebing described men who were uninterested in coitus but fantasized about being beaten by women, men who would pay women to shun them publicly, and men who paid prostitutes to walk on their backs. He separated masochists into three types: symbolic masochists, "who satisfy themselves with the symbolic representations of situations corresponding with their perversion . . . they may be satisfied with . . . acts of cruelty"; ideal masochists, whose

"psychical perversion remains entirely within the spheres of imagination and fancy, and no attempt at realization is made"; and latent masochists, or "the very numerous class of foot- and shoe-fetishists," who formed a bridge between masochism and fetishism.<sup>21</sup> Despite the diversity of practices, Krafft-Ebing gave the perversion coherence because all masochists professed the desire to submit; they were sexually aroused by the "idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by the person as by a master, humiliated and abused."<sup>22</sup> A power relation became the defining aspect of masochism.

Re-reading Rousseau's confession as a performance of powerlessness allows us to understand Krafft-Ebing's insistence on using the label "masochism." In Rousseau's description of the incident with Miss Lambercier, the domineering nursemaid/schoolmarm transgresses her lower class origins to discipline her unruly charge. Though she is superficially in command of the situation, the true boss is Jean Jacques, who endows the scene with an erotic charge because it arouses his desire. The dynamic between the boy and his disciplining servant plays on disparities of class, gender, and potentially, ethnicity. According to Krafft-Ebing, the boy's arousal came from the momentary disruption of the social hierarchy, even though his actual social standing was never actually jeopardized. Krafft-Ebing described Rousseau's pleasure as coming from the powerlessness brought about by social transgression.

Masochism's link with the middle and upper class further coded it as feminine, according to the logic of degeneration.<sup>23</sup> The theory of degeneration held that visible, biological causes were to blame for a variety of social ills, including promiscuity, criminality, and perversion. It was assumed that these undesirable character traits became worse with each successive generation; in psychiatric circles, this inevitability led to therapeutic nihilism, an interest in physical typologies, and an attempt to make correlations between class and disease. In many ways masochism, indeed the notion of sexual perversion itself, reflected contemporary fears about the disintegration of patriarchal society.<sup>24</sup> Following Suzanne Stewart, we can read the creation of masochism as Krafft-Ebing's response to a perceived crisis of political and social change. Stewart writes, "Male masochism . . . is one way by which fin-de-siècle culture reflected and sought to come to terms with a serious crisis of liberalism and of the bourgeois subject."<sup>25</sup> Krafft-Ebing's interest in masochism stemmed both from his inability to understand the masochistic desire to submit and from the presumed abundance of masochists, which drove fear into the hearts of psychiatrists. In Krafft-

Ebing's view, masochism threatened to upend the established social order by placing women, Slavs, and other non-Germanic ethnicities in positions of power. Krafft-Ebing felt that masculinity was under attack and that the feminization of men, who should be powerful within the existing social order, was a symptom of the breakdown of society.

Krafft-Ebing described masochists as "possess[ing] feminine traits of character," and he made note of this in the case studies.<sup>26</sup> Case eight in *Neue Forschungen* possessed a hairless trunk, while case forty-five in the seventh edition of the text was described as possessing an "abnormally broad pelvis, the ilia are flat, and the pelvis is wide, tilted, and decidedly feminine."<sup>27</sup> This gendering of the masochist's body relied partly upon the historic relation between degeneration and feminization and partly on Krafft-Ebing's explanation of masochism as "a partial effemination."<sup>28</sup>

Though masochism existed within a framework of psychological interiority and physical feminization, Krafft-Ebing found a way to explain some masochists' desire for pain. Just as Rousseau's desire to be whipped was not central to his masochism, the notion of pain as a superficial, symbolic aspect of masochism allowed Krafft-Ebing to separate masochism, a perversion he was introducing, from flagellation, which was already extant. One could argue that the creation of the category of masochism was due to an aggregation of cases into a critical mass, but there was a deeper, more theoretical rationale behind its separation from passive flagellation.<sup>29</sup> While flagellation may have been desired on the part of some masochists, it was merely the "mechanical irritation of [the] spinal centre."<sup>30</sup> For the masochist, Krafft-Ebing explained, flagellation was only a symbol of his desire to submit to a woman.

According to Krafft-Ebing, masochism had its psychological origins in the desire for submission; pain was secondary to this enterprise. Though Krafft-Ebing argued that pain might offer masochists a concrete outlet for pleasure in lieu of fantasy, many of the case studies in *Psychopathia Sexualis* noted their disappointment when faced with real pain because it could not live up to their fantasies. Krafft-Ebing alluded to this in one of the case studies when he suggested that beating was not a crucial factor in the patient's sexual excitation by noting the scant amount of beating that took place before ejaculation. Case Nine in *Neue Forschungen*, wrote, "I always thought I should find more real pleasure in that than in my fancies, but it was always less. . . . At last I overcame the last vestige of my shyness, and one day, to realize my dreams, had myself whipped, trod upon, etc., by a prostitute. The result was a *great disappointment*."<sup>31</sup>



Krafft-Ebing's dismissal of pain from the masochistic relationship is striking for several reasons. First, it allowed him to create a novel perversion separate from passivism or algophilia, which were used by other psychiatrists to describe the relationship between pain and sex.<sup>32</sup> Masochism, as described by Krafft-Ebing, had features similar to these perversions, but was rendered distinct because the desire to submit was the dominant marker of masochism. In addition to highlighting the abnormality of submission, this dismissal of pain fit in with Western societies' growing aversion to pain in the late nineteenth century. As society became more bourgeois, the desire to inflict or receive pain became a marker of savagery. Pain was redefined as unacceptable and became repulsive.<sup>33</sup>

The turn away from pain also led Krafft-Ebing to emphasize masochism's relationship to interiority, which depended on language, desire, and patient agency. Krafft-Ebing's interest in interiority was a dramatic shift away from the prevailing psychosexual theories of degeneration. This shift has often been attributed to the rise of psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's insistence on listening to patient narratives rather than diagnosing them on a purely corporeal basis.<sup>34</sup> As Harry Oosterhuis suggests, the attention that Krafft-Ebing gave to the inner thoughts of the patient offers a corrective to the persistent historical myth of Freud as liberator of the interior.<sup>35</sup>

Krafft-Ebing's turn toward interiority is exemplified by looking at different portrayals, different drafts, if you will, of the same patient. In the fifth edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, case twenty-five is listed as an example of passive flagellation. The patient is described in dry, clinical language: "Mr. X, 28 Years Old, man of letters . . . The patient had wanted a prostitute to beat him for three years before he finally went. The result was a disappointment, he had neither erection or ejaculation . . . he returned to masturbation."<sup>36</sup> As the fourth case of masochism in *Neue Forschungen*, Krafft-Ebing elaborated on the patient's psychological state. He described the patient's youthful dreams of flagellation and labeled his desire to be beaten as masochistic because the patient was more aroused by the thought of being beaten than by the beatings themselves: "X, man of letters, aged twenty-eight . . . At the age of six he had dreams of being whipped in the nude by a woman. Upon awakening, intense lustful excitement . . . Three years ago he had an impulse to have himself whipped by a prostitute. The patient was disappointed, for neither erection nor ejaculation occurred . . . The only things in women that interested him were the hands. Powerful women with big fists were his preference."<sup>37</sup> Though Krafft-Ebing described the emergence of masochism in *Neue Forschungen* as



a tribute to the continual advancement of scientific research on sexuality, the shift toward interiority was indicative of a new paradigm in thinking about sexuality. This was true not only in cases of masochism, but could also be seen in cases of homosexuality and fetishism.<sup>38</sup> In part, this trend speaks to the creation of a new category of person (masochists) in contrast to a person who practices certain behaviors (such as passive flagellation), but we should think about this shift as occurring beyond the diagnostic level of psychiatry and becoming a central component of self-making and identification.

### The Literary Act of Making a Masochist

Patients did self-identify as masochists and, therefore, reinforced the idea of the pathology's interiority.<sup>39</sup> The emphasis upon interiority was a way to distance masochism from degeneration and feminization; for these patients, interiority was conflated with invisibility. Unlike other psychosexual disorders, which some psychiatrists claimed marked the bodies of perverts, often according to the logic of degeneration, masochism could only be detected if one admitted submissive desires. Despite laying claim to masochistic urges, the author of case fifty in the seventh edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* described himself as physically and mentally normal:

I must also confess that, in spite of its marked pathological character, masochism is not only incapable of destroying my pleasure in life, but it does not in the least affect my outward life. When not in a masochistic state, as far as feeling and action are concerned, I am a perfectly normal man. During the activity of the masochistic tendencies there is, of course, a great revolution in my feeling, but my outward manner of life suffers no change; I have a calling that makes it necessary for me to move much in public, and I pursue it in the masochistic condition as well as ever.<sup>40</sup>

This description underlines the importance of self-identification to the masochist. Without external symptoms, masochism could be thought of as an invisible pathology, manifest only in fantasies of submission that lurked within the corridors of the psyche until they could be coaxed to the surface via a symbolic interface, which was linked to masochism's literariness. Access to the masochist's internal feelings was essential to the diagnosis of the pathology. Because Krafft-Ebing lifted case studies

directly from letters and autobiographies, many of *Psychopathia Sexualis's* case studies were written as first person confessions, which provided Krafft-Ebing with insight into the patients' desires and allowed him to diagnose them as masochists.

Since masochism was a pathology of the interior and as such could not be detected except through confession, an explicit declaration was needed for diagnosis. Anyone, but especially the reader, *could* be a masochist. This conflation of the pervert/reader suggests a pornographic cycle of reading and writing outside of *Psychopathia Sexualis's* circulation as a scientific work. This is especially noteworthy when one considers the men Krafft-Ebing described: wealthy (upper middle class), white, predominately heterosexual men. In part this bias can be explained by the fact that the case studies original to *Psychopathia Sexualis* were either culled from the ranks of Krafft-Ebing's private patients, who were upper middle class, or the case studies were unsolicited autobiographical manuscripts from readers of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, who should also be considered middle class. The social class of the masochist is important for several reasons. On a practical level, the masochist's financial status granted him access to prostitutes, who were often instrumental to the practice of masochism. More importantly, middle class status means that we can assume a certain degree of literacy on the part of the masochist, whose fantasies and practices were, in fact, imbued with the literature of the middle class.

The connection between masochism and literacy is integral to the history of masochism's practice. The inaugural masochist, case nine in *Neue Forschungen*, urged Krafft-Ebing to consider masochism a perversion of its own, worthy of scientific investigation and suggested the link between the practice of masochism and the literary work of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Jean Jacques Rousseau.<sup>41</sup> This connection to literature shaped the practice of masochism by providing models of fantasy and aesthetics, but the relationship between masochism and literature goes even deeper. The literary references not only aided in patients' self-diagnosis, but also provided Krafft-Ebing a mechanism for medical diagnosis.

In examining a woman who claimed to be a masochist, for example, her identification with Rousseau was the determining factor for Krafft-Ebing; it became a shortcut to her psyche. Krafft-Ebing was particularly interested in the "inversion" of heterosexual power relations that occurred in masochism; he was less interested in finding cases of male, homosexual masochists and female, heterosexual or homosexual masochists, though a few do appear in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Since women

were assumed to be naturally submissive and predisposed to desire pain, Krafft-Ebing was reluctant to identify any women as masochists. The first female masochist, case seventy-three in the seventh edition, used Rousseau's narrative to understand her desire. She wrote, "With these ideas of being whipped I had a feeling of actual delight, and pictured in my fancy how fine it would be to be whipped by one of my female friends. . . . Only when I read 'Rousseau's confessions,' at the age of thirty-four, did I understand what my longing for whippings meant, and that my abnormal ideas were like those of Rousseau."<sup>42</sup> In his notes on the case, Krafft-Ebing wrote, "on account of . . . the reference to Rousseau, this case may with certainty be called a case of masochism."<sup>43</sup> The woman was labeled a masochist because of her dependence on an economy of symbolic fantasy, which was marked by a fidelity to the literary model provided by Rousseau.

In the search for a literary and diagnostic model of masochism, there was an abundance of choice. Some masochists, including the ones we have already seen, turned to Rousseau's *Confessions* for inspiration: "'Rousseau's Confessions,' which then fell into my hands, was a great discovery. I found a condition described that resembled mine in essentials. I was still more astonished at the similarity of my ideas to those I read of in the writings of Sacher-Masoch."<sup>44</sup> Others turned to *Psychopathia Sexualis* for diagnostic inspiration. We can see an example of this readerly appropriation in a letter written to Krafft-Ebing in July 1900 that describes the author's life story and breaks it down according to various diagnostic subheadings, including "First thoughts on masochism influenced by Sacher-Masoch."<sup>45</sup> The author not only frames his letter as a direct response to *Psychopathia Sexualis*, but he borrows its scientific style—his marginalia reference salient aspects of his life story using Krafft-Ebing's terminology and style. Most of the masochists featured in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, however, borrowed heavily and explicitly from Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*. Like Rousseau's *Confessions*, *Venus in Furs* was read as a case study, not only by Krafft-Ebing but also by many masochists. The text functioned as a tableau of pornographic suffering; the descriptions titillated as well as instructed readers in how to transform urges, desires, and dreams into masochistic performances and to thereby become masochists.

*Venus in Furs* is a controversial text. Recently, Sacher-Masoch's novella has been read as a microcosm of the larger ethnic tensions at work in the twilight of the Austria-Hungary Empire.<sup>46</sup> John Noyes argues that masochism's emergence in *Venus in Furs* should be understood as Sacher-Masoch's attempt to subvert the dominant German

culture through play and fantasy, while Larry Wolff describes *Venus in Furs* as having "a perverse nostalgia for slavery."<sup>47</sup> In the context of masochism, *Venus in Furs* is most significant for its introduction of the Ideal Mistress, the woman to whom the masochist submits.<sup>48</sup>

Severin, the masochistic protagonist in *Venus in Furs*, invokes a "cold, cruel" woman (Wanda) dressed in furs and high heels, a woman who frequently brandishes a whip and demands worship at her feet. Under contract with Severin to treat him as her absolute slave, Wanda becomes the exemplary Ideal Mistress.<sup>49</sup> While Severin is Austrian, Wanda, his mistress, is an ethnic woman of Slavic descent.<sup>50</sup> The ethnic power reversal (a Slav in command of an Austrian) plays into larger political issues of ethnic domination and submission.<sup>51</sup> Though Krafft-Ebing did not concern himself with the Ideal Mistress, except to note that she was not a sadist but more frequently a prostitute or a figment of the masochist's imagination, the case studies in *Psychopathia Sexualis* devoted substantial portions of their narratives to imagining and describing her. In fact, the Ideal Mistress was crucial to Krafft-Ebing's (and his patients') understanding of masochism as an inversion of Austria-Hungary's gender and ethnic hierarchies because she was the masochist's Other. As such, the book is useful for understanding the tropes and economy of symbolism that would become emblematic of masochism.

Masochists drew upon Sacher-Masoch's descriptions of Wanda and the descriptions of the elaborate performances of subjugation as inspiration for their own fantasies. Case nine in *Neue Forschungen* described the influence of Sacher-Masoch in the construction of a masochistic fantasy. He wrote, "Here there may have been a conscious imitation of the 'Venus in Furs.' It seems to me that the writings of Sacher-Masoch have done much to develop this perversion in those predisposed."<sup>52</sup> Another man wrote, ". . . [A] person hired by me could never take the place in my imagination of a 'cruel mistress.' I doubt whether there are sadistically constituted women like Sacher-Masoch's heroines."<sup>53</sup>

Still another wrote that "he was attracted and satisfied only by women wearing high heels and short jackets ('Hungarian fashion'). . . . He was charmed by ladies' calves only when elegant shoes were on the feet."<sup>54</sup> The aesthetic dimensions of masochism, inspired by the fashions of *Venus in Furs*, took on a life of their own. They even led Krafft-Ebing to subsume fetishism, which he also called latent masochism, under the rubric of masochism because of the focus on objects, particularly footwear. The aesthetic qualities of masochism thus formed an important component in masochists' fantasy lives, and they rendered

masochism visible to the outside world through the commodification of these symbols.<sup>55</sup> The formalization and visibility of masochism's connection to the symbolic was translated into a medical discourse of the symptomatic.

### Confession as a Masochistic Practice

Confession proved to be as crucial to the performance (and self-diagnosis) of masochism as reading. In "The Rhetoric of 'I am an Alcoholic': Three Perspectives," Michael Kleine describes ways in which the utterance of the confessional sentence, "I am an alcoholic," in the context of twelve-step groups constitutes a speech act that organizes symptoms and behaviors in such a way that the speaker, in and by the act of utterance, becomes an alcoholic. When alcoholics thus make themselves visible, they compose themselves as subjects for narrative, therapeutic, and social interventions and interactions that are unavailable to them prior to the declaration.<sup>56</sup> The confessions in Kraft-Ebbing's case studies function in much the same way. More generally in medicine, this kind of composition and performance reveals the tension between the medical ability to diagnose and the personal desire for self-knowledge/recognition, and it highlights the complex maneuvering of agency between doctor/patient and confessor/reader. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes the medical confession as part of the modern "incitement to discourse," which is the desire to discuss one's secrets/perversions. He argues that confession to medical professionals emerged as a disciplinary practice that took precedence in determinations of the "truth" about a patient. The patient's desire to confess endowed the doctor with power and authority that had formerly been reserved only for priests. The impulse to confess was fed in part by the increased value of a professional assessment; self-knowledge, in contrast, was devalued.<sup>57</sup> The increased professional status and ideological power of medicine fostered the growth of the *scientia sexualis*.<sup>58</sup> This growth however, is complicated by the active desire of masochists to confess as part of their own practice of subject formation.

Since both Krafft-Ebing and his patients took Rousseau to be an exemplary masochist, I will conclude with another analysis of the *Confessions*. In many ways Rousseau fit the profile of Krafft-Ebing's masochists: he was white, educated, wealthy, and heterosexual. It is also fitting that the inaugural confession in the *Confessions*, which is itself considered an inaugural secular confession, a modern autobiography,

and description of modern man, concerns what becomes known as masochism. Rousseau's literary creation of an autonomous self allows us to describe the writing of the *Confessions* as a technology of the self.<sup>59</sup> In order to understand Rousseau as an exemplary masochist, however, we must think not only of Rousseau as writer/narrator, but also of his readers (both real and imagined) and the performance of submission that Rousseau both described and enacted. In this case, the actual readers (though numerous and important to my argument) of the *Confessions* are not as important as the implied reader who is linguistically conjured by Rousseau through his use of "I" and "you." In this section of the *Confessions*, "you" is implicit but present in Rousseau's explanatory asides and rhetorical questions: "Who would believe this childish discipline, received at eight years old, from the hand of a woman of thirty, should influence my propensities, my desires, my passions, my very self, for the rest of my life, and that in quite a contrary sense from what might naturally have been expected?"<sup>60</sup> The strategic use of "I" and the suggestion of an ideal "you" did more than mark Rousseau as a subject; it allowed him to ask the reader to call upon his or her own experience and knowledge to construct the meaning behind certain events and re-experience them with the narrator. Through the intimate process of imagining Rousseau's desires, the reader is seduced into empathizing with his point of view.<sup>61</sup> In this way, Rousseau's *Confessions* appears to make the inner workings of Rousseau's mind transparent and therefore ripe for diagnosis. In Rousseau's description of the incident with Miss Lambercier, Krafft-Ebing read Rousseau's confession not only as a desire for submission but also as part of the performance of being a masochist. Additionally, Rousseau's confession performs submission to every reader by asking for and anticipating readerly judgment.

We see echoes of Rousseau's performance of confession and self-construction in the case studies of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In fact, both the textual visibility and the rhetorical transparency of Rousseau's internal desires as well as the practice of confession became integral to Krafft-Ebing's formulation of masochism. The written confession was used to convey powerlessness and the desire to submit, both of which characterized masochism. Though this form of self-narration was not exclusive to masochism, what is remarkable about this self-expression is its dual purpose as an act of masochist- and pornography-making. One could not be labeled a masochist *without* the act of confession because it made visible the desire to submit and because it situated the confessing masochist as already submitting. Krafft-Ebing character-

ized masochism as a perversion of agency and fantasy separate from flagellation and pain. As such, it relied on a conscious performance of the desire to submit. Rousseau was not a masochist until he wrote about his desires. Without his public confession he was only part of an economy of pain, his desire to relinquish agency was hidden. The act of confession cemented his role in the cycle of submission.

The other aspect of these confessions of masochistic thoughts and behaviors is their status as pornography. Even as there was a more generalized trend toward erotic images of suffering in place of actualizations of pain, the importance of literary scenes of suffering to masochism's economy of fantasy cannot be underestimated. It is precisely because the case studies (lay confessions) were read alongside Rousseau and Sacher-Masoch by people who recognized the impulses and responded to the enticements described that they functioned as pornography. In addition to the relief offered by recognition, the readers described excitement and arousal, often formulating their desires alongside the templates offered to them. In these situations, confession became erotic performance.<sup>62</sup>

We should, finally, read Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which was published years before Freud's 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, as introducing interiority and literature as central components of sexuality. Krafft-Ebing's formulation of masochism as a literary or narrative phenomenon, as an approach to creating a sexual self through reading and writing, allows one to read the "disease," its symptoms, and its experiential quality through a particular matrix of aesthetic signs—specifically Rousseau's *Confessions* and Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, as well as subsequent editions of *Psychopathia Sexualis*. It invites patients to speak and depends upon their diagnostic compositions to complete its own diagnostic work and to reach its own conclusions. Further, Krafft-Ebing's formulation of masochism allows us to understand masochism as a technology of the self, a practice of identity formation that disrupts the traditional top-down models of power and offers, more broadly, a potential alternative to the assumptive practices of modern medicine in which the selves of patients and their own self-knowledge are too often set aside and silenced in favor of medical technologies, clinical narratives, and exercises of power that short circuit literary engagement and overwrite the selves of both physicians and patients.



## NOTES

This essay has benefited from insight and comments provided by Anne Harrington, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Katharine Park, Marwa Elshakry, Nasser Zakariya, Stephanie Clare, and the anonymous reviewers of *Literature and Medicine*.

1. Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jaques Rousseau*.

2. Ibid.

3. Indeed, they only occurred once more before Rousseau claims that Miss Lambercier recognized his excitement and ceased both the punishment and her care for the boy (Rousseau, *Confessions*).

4. Rousseau, *Confessions*.

5. For an overview of the history of autobiography that addresses the Victorian attachment to the term and Victorian constructions of autobiography, see Rinehart "The Victorian Approach." There is a tremendous body of literature that describes the importance of *Confessions* for scholars of autobiography. The most prominent articles include: Hart, "Notes for an Anatomy," and Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement." Rousseau's teleological construction of his confessions in combination is partially attributed to his desire to clear his name from slanderous accusations. For more on this, see Rosario, "Phantastical Pollutions," and Wright, "Rousseau's Confessions."

6. Despite superficial connections to Sacher-Masoch's life (his wife's name was also Wanda), the autobiographical nature of *Venus in Furs* is disputed. Some argue that Sacher-Masoch's link to sexual pathology is undeserved; his writings are read as allegorical statements regarding social conflict "transposed onto private life" (54). Sacher-Masoch's erotic sensibilities are read as identification with Slavic minorities and their struggles: "the causes of minority or exploited groups, such as Eastern European Jews and Ruthenian peasants, provided him with an excuse for plunging his male heroes into delectable bondage, but at the same time it provided a platform for a literary politics aimed against the dominant Prussian tradition in German letters" (54). Noyes goes on to situate Sacher-Masoch within the fin-de-siècle struggle against marginalization by modernity; his writings "need not be interpreted as a symptom of his pathological condition" (54). Krafft-Ebing, however, read the text as an indication of Sacher-Masoch's pathology (Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission*).

7. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 167.

8. Ibid., 168.

9. In many ways, Rousseau fits the portrait of the ideal masochist quite well. Analyzing Rousseau as a pervert and using his *Confessions* to generate pathographies lent credibility to both the psychiatrist, who was given credit for diagnosis, and the perversion, which became visible simultaneously as a potential danger to everyman and a rarity afflicting only the overtly different.

10. Ibid., 167–8.

11. I have previously discussed masochism's literary origins in "The Literary Symptom: Krafft-Ebing and the Invention of Masochism."

12. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

13. Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*.

14. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, and Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*.

15. Foucault, et al., "Technologies of the Self," 18.

16. For a more extensive background on Richard von Krafft-Ebing, see Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*.

17. For more on the research conducted on sexuality at the same time as Krafft-Ebing, see Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*, 43–55. Also see Bullough, *Science in the Bedroom*, and Luft, *Eros and Inwardness*.

18. Krafft-Ebing analyzed cases from Benjamin Tarnowsky, Cesare Lombroso, Paolo Mantegazza, and Albert von Schrenck-Notzing.

19. Oosterhuis, 47.

20. For example, *Neue Forschungen* contained eleven case studies of masochism, five of which were taken from other psychiatrists, while the twelfth edition contained 35 cases, only five of which were from *Neue Forschungen*.

21. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 159–60, 161, 171.

22. *Ibid.*, 131.

23. For more on the logic of degeneration, see Showalter, *The Female Malady*.

24. This social anxiety materialized itself in a multitude of ways at the turn of the century; the increasing popularity of sciences such as criminology, anthropology, and medicine, all of which struggled to define difference in essentialized biological terms, spawned changes in literature, law, architecture, and other organs of the social and political body. This widespread fear of the decline of civilization can be found in any number of books. While the link with law is obvious, the link between these sciences and literature can be seen in Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, and the link to architecture can be seen in Canales and Herscher, "Criminal Skins."

25. Stewart, *Sublime Surrender*, 14.

26. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 212.

27. Case eight in *Neue Forschungen* appears as case fifty-eight in the twelfth edition. It says,

Mr. Z., official, aged 50; tall, muscular, healthy. He is said to come of healthy parentage, but his father was thirty years older than his mother. A sister, two years older than Z., suffers with delusions of persecution. There is nothing remarkable in Z's external appearance. Skeleton entirely masculine; abundant beard, but no hair on trunk. He characterizes himself as a man of sanguine temperament, whom no one can depress; although irascible and quick-tempered, he is quick to regret outbursts (Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 151).

28. The logic of degeneration led Krafft-Ebing to describe his patients in somatic and behavioral terms. Following Lombroso's methodology in *The Criminal Man*, *Psychopathia Sexualis* attempted to correlate certain physical traits with sexual pathology (Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 211).

29. There is a historic reason for Krafft-Ebing's desire to separate flagellation from masochism; three of his first cases of masochism were originally coded as flagellation in the fifth edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which was published just before *Neue Forschungen*.

30. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 141.

31. This case does not appear in the twelfth edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, so I am drawing on Krafft-Ebing, *Neue Forschungen*.

32. Crozier, "Philosophy in the English Boudoir."

33. See for example Halttunen, "Humanitarianism." Halttunen deals explicitly with Anglo-American culture but references Krafft-Ebing's work. The pattern is evident across many western cultures.

34. Marneffe, "Looking and Listening."

35. Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*.

36. "herr x, 28 J, literat, stammt von geistig und körperlich gesundem Vater . . . vor drei jahren konnte Patient dem Gelüste, sich von einer Puella flagelliren zu lassen, nicht mehr widerstehen. Er war enttäuscht, da sowohl Erektion als Ejaculation ausblieben, bekam einen heilsamen Abscheu vor Flagellation, verfiel aber bald wieder der Onanie" (Author's translation of Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1890, 60).

37. This case becomes case fifty-two in the twelfth edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Krafft-Ebing, 1922, 140).

38. In addition to providing a detailed account of his sexual desires and actions, case nine in *Neue Forschungen* urged Krafft-Ebing to consider masochism

a perversion of its own, worthy of scientific investigation and suggested the link between the practice of masochism and the literary work of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Jean Jacques Rousseau (Krafft-Ebing, *Neue Forschungen*, 25).

39. This space for the agency of the patient is documented in Oosterhuis's discussion of Krafft-Ebing. See Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*.

40. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 149.

41. Krafft-Ebing, *Neue Forschungen*, 25.

42. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 199; original italics removed.

43. Ibid.; original italics removed.

44. This case is not found in the twelfth edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, so I am citing the seventh edition (Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1892, 92).

45. Ringen, letter to Richard von Krafft-Ebing.

46. For more on the colonial fantasies of the Austria-Hungary Empire, see Bach, "Faraway, So Close."

47. Wolff, "Introduction," xvii; Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission*; and Biale, "Masochism and Philosemitism."

48. This term was borrowed from Gilles Deleuze, who uses it to describe his understanding of the fantastical mistress of the masochist's fantasies. For more on the Ideal Mistress see Deleuze, *Masochism*.

49. See Deleuze, *Masochism* for more examples of masochistic symbolism.

50. Wanda is a complex character who cannot be read in a simple way. Before he meets her, Severin describes her in the following way: "She is said to be really beautiful, this widow, still very young, twenty-four at the most, and very rich." Later on, Wanda gives her own history in this way: "Quite simply, my father was an intelligent man. From my cradle onward I was surrounded by replicas of ancient art; at ten years of age I read *Gil Blas*, at twelve *La Pucelle*. Where others had Hop-o'-my-thumb, Bluebeard, Cinderella, as childhood friends, mine were Venus and Apollo, Hercules and Lackoon." Still later, when she and Severin travel, she spends large sums of money, gives away Severin's clothing, and dresses him in her livery, complete with buttons marked by her coat of arms. Part of her appeal for Severin and, I would argue, for the masochists of Krafft-Ebing's time was an explicit and implicit power reversal along multiple axes. Here, I highlight the dimension of Slavic-Austrian tension, which emphasizes elements of exoticism and of the "superiority" of Austrian over Slavic culture (Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*).

51. Noyes, *Mastery of Submission*, Chapter 2.

52. Krafft-Ebing, *Neue Forschungen*, 25.

53. Krafft-Ebing *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1922, 146; original italics removed.

54. Ibid., 135.

55. Stewart makes this point about the capitalist aspects of masochism in Stewart, *Sublime Surrender*.

56. See especially section 2, 156ff.

57. This self-directed impulse to confess to the doctor can be found throughout *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and the book's continuous enlargement and revisions can be attributed to the contribution of its readers.

58. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

59. There is a large literature that situates Jean Jacques Rousseau as one of the first to articulate a modern self. As Charles Taylor writes in *Sources of the Self*, "Rousseau is at the origin point of a great deal of contemporary culture, of the philosophies of self-exploration, as well as of the creeds which make self-determining freedom the key to virtue. He is the starting point of a transformation in modern culture towards a deeper inwardness and a radical autonomy" (363).

60. Rousseau, *Confessions*.

61. Catherine Beaudry argues that Rousseau employs this strategy in his description of the incident with Miss Lambercier. She writes, "In the labyrinth of Rousseau's depiction of desire, it is the reader who is ultimately responsible for the

reconstruction of the scene with all of its sexual and sensual components. The entire paragraph demands the complicity of the reader" (*The Role of the Reader*, 84).

62. This turn towards literature and interiority is well documented in psychoanalysis. Scholars frequently cite Sigmund Freud's use of Greek myth, Jewish folktales, and other literary sources to structure his understanding of the unconscious and its attendant complexes. Historically, we understand psychoanalysis as an attempt to describe sexuality as internal to the subject. Freud imagined that the task of the analyst was to decipher a patient's words and actions in ways that made the patient's interior desires visible. In this way, early psychoanalysis placed itself on the side of interiority and psychic trauma against discourses of degeneration and hereditary biological causation. There are many books that deal with this aspect of Freud. For example, Meisel, *The Literary Freud*, and Frankland, *Freud's Literary Culture*.

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